

T-515

BESSIE LEE (Chincoteague skiff)
St. Michaels, Maryland

This vessel is an 18'4-1/2" long deadrise sailing skiff of the type known as a Chincoteague or Sinepuxent Bay skiff. She has a beam of 7'2" and a depth of 11 1/2". Built at Capeville, Virginia in 1920 by Hanson Down, she is now owned by the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. She was originally built for sailing with a two-masted rig and a large centerboard, but her rig is now missing. BESSIE LEE is significant as a rare survival of a very localized type of Bay skiff developed near the Sinepuxent Bay for use as working crabbing and tonging boats. Her restoration (1983-84) by the Museum boat shop is being carefully documented.

Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

Survey No. T-515

Magi No. 2105155733

DOE ☐ yes ☐ no

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic BESSIE LEE

and/or common Chincoteague skiff CBMM 82-14-1

2. Location

street & number Hill Street ☐ not for publicationcity, town St. Michaels ☐ vicinity of congressional district

state Maryland county Talbot

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum

street & number telephone no.: 745-2916

city, town St. Michaels state and zip code Maryland 21663

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. liber

street & number folio

city, town state

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title

date ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Survey No. T-515

Condition

☐ excellent
☐ good
☒ fair

Check one

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☐ original site
☐ moved date of move _____

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

This boat is an 18'4 1/2" deadrise sailing skiff of the type known as a Chincoteague or Sinepuxent Bay skiff, or seaside bateau. She has a beam of 7'2" and draws 11 1/2". Built at Capeville, Virginia in 1920 by Hanson Down, she is currently undergoing restoration by the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, St. Michaels. The restoration process is being carefully documented. She was built for sailing with a two-masted rig and a large centerboard, but her rig is now missing. The boat is a rare survival of a local type developed near Sinepuxent Bay. Related to other types of V-bottomed boats along the East Coast, the skiff was used for crabbing, tonging, and fishing.

BESSIE LEE was built using light cross-planked construction, with a plank keel with a centerboard slot cut through it. The planks rise almost vertically at the bow. She has a straight, raking stem with a 5 1/2" wide stempost and a square, raked transom with an elliptical top pierced with a slot for the tiller. She has the sweeping sheer characteristic of the type and some flare to her topsides. The bottom planking is screwed into the garboard at the chine and into ribbands fore and aft. The rising planks are wide, carvel-fitted boards. The half-deck is planked fore-and-aft and there is a 1" rubbing strake and an interior coaming. The rudder is hung outboard on pintles mounted on the transom and the tiller is led through a slot in the transom.

There are two mast steps, one of which serves also as a thwart, and a stern seat fitted to the interior of the boat. The rig consisted of two unstayed masts with leg-of-mutton sails--the large foresail having a sprit and a short clew club as well as a short, vertical gaff. There is a V-outrigger over the stern, to which the main (aftermost) sail was sheeted. The main mast was shorter than the foremast, and well aft, set with a rake to it. The main sail had a sprit.

The boat is half-decked, the decks originally covered with gray-painted canvas. Interior fittings include the centerboard trunk, thwarts, and stern seat. In addition to its sail rig the boat could be rowed and there is a set of metal oarlocks on the coaming just forward of the main mast-step.

8. Significance

Survey No. T-515

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1920 Builder/Architect Hanson Down

check: Applicable Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D
and/or

Applicable Exception: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Level of Significance: ☐ national ☐ state ☐ local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

BESSIE LEE is significant as a rare survival of a very localized type of Bay skiff developed near the Sinepuxent Bay, of which not many existed in the first place. According to Howard Chapelle, the V-bottom Chincoteague skiff is a late development, appearing about 1905. He further states that only a few boatbuilders are responsible for all of the V-bottomed skiffs on Sinepuxent Bay. By the 1950s only a few still survived as working crabbing and tonging boats.

The Chesapeake Bay crabbing skiff is an indigenous type which is to be seen in many different local forms and variations, reflecting design innovations by particular builders or definite regional characteristics. The V-bottom, deadrise form, first seen in the local skiff/bateau vessel type, was later adapted by local boatbuilders for the larger skipjack, or two-sail bateau. Thus, these surviving examples of Chesapeake-area skiffs are important in understanding the construction techniques and design innovations still to be seen today in the surviving skipjack fleet.

BESSIE LEE is currently undergoing restoration at the Museum boat shop, which process is being well documented for future understanding of the Chincoteague skiff type.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. T-515

Howard I. Chapelle, American Small Sailing Craft (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1951)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name _____

Quadrangle scale _____

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

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Verbal boundary description and justification _____

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Anne Witty/ M.E. Hayward

organization Maryland Historical Society

date 5/84

street & number 201 W. Monument St.

telephone 685-3750

city or town Baltimore

state Maryland

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Shaw House
21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 269-2438

has a simple leg-of-mutton sail sheeted to a V-outtrigger over the stern. The rig was obviously designed for single-handed sailing and is a very good one.

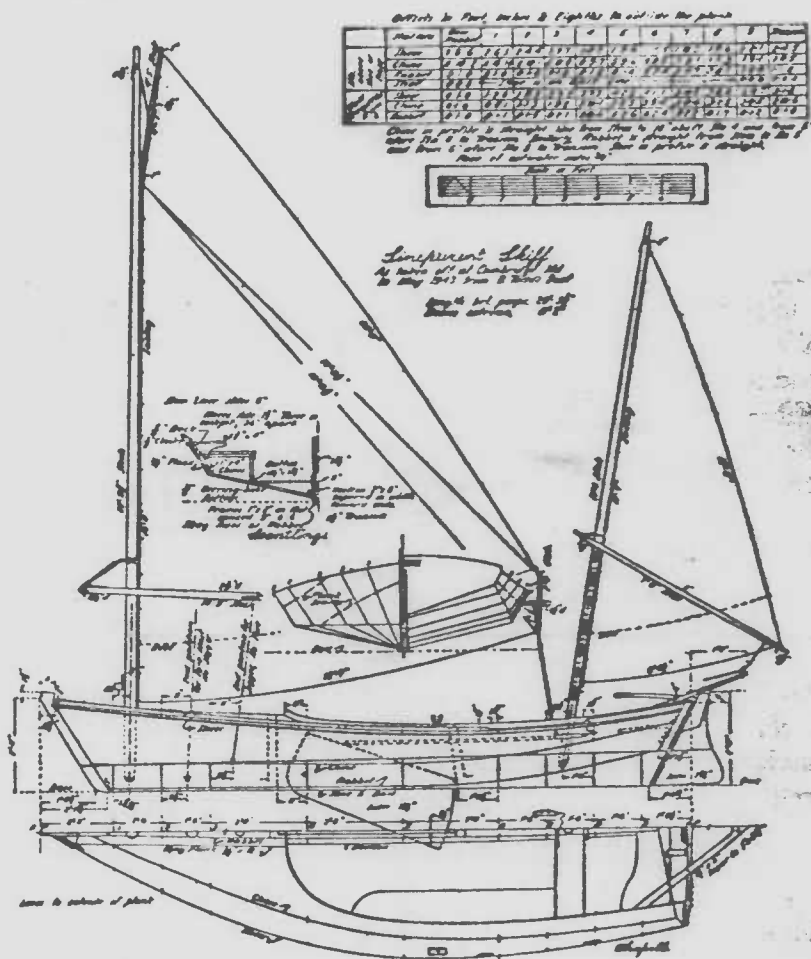


Fig. 118. Type of V-bottomed skiff built at Chincoteague Island, Virginia, for fishing. Only two boats were alive in 1951.

The boats were rarely very large, and the majority ranged in size between 16 and 26 feet on deck. A few were built larger—up to 40 feet, it is claimed—at Chincoteague Island. None of the boats in recent years have had cuddies. The model seems to have

developed from a flat-bottomed skiff, and sailing skiffs having the characteristic sheer, raking bow, and stern of the Chincoteague V-bottom may still be seen occasionally. The latter skiff is apparently a rather late development, and I was told that it appeared in the present century, about 1905. Three builders, John Richardson, Jake Dunning, and William Wimbrough, are said to have built all of the V-bottomed skiffs on Sinepuxent Bay. In 1951, two or three of the Chincoteague V-bottomed skiffs were still in use at Ocean City, Maryland. The power-garvey has almost completely replaced the old V-bottomed Chincoteague boats on Sinepuxent Bay.

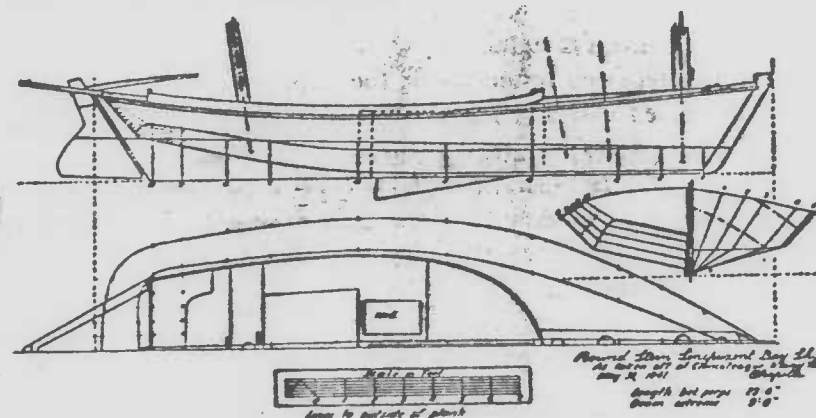


Fig. 119. Chincoteague skiff with a round stern of a form once used by some Chesapeake Bay bateaux.

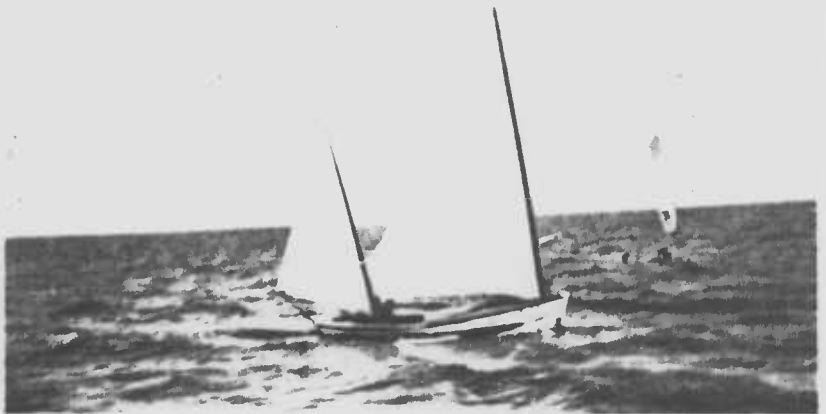
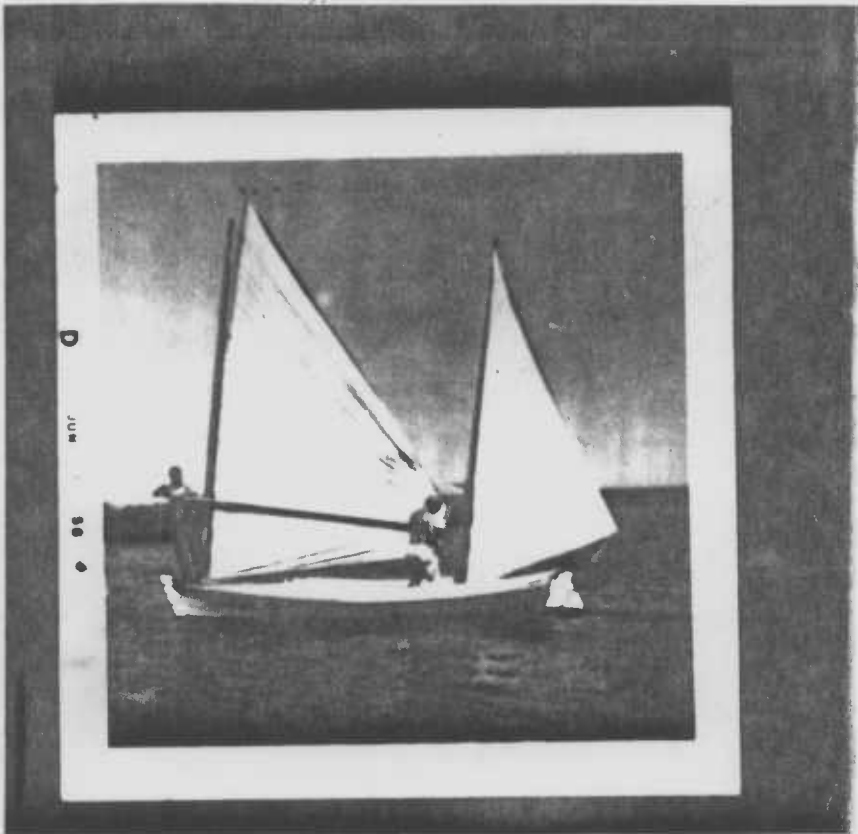
The V-bottomed sailing hull spread southward from the Chesapeake, and skiffs were built at Beaufort, North Carolina, on the same construction methods as used at Smith Island in the Chesapeake. The Beaufort skiffs are open and are rigged with a spritsail and, sometimes, a jib. These skiffs are narrow and undecked; they have a shallow block forefoot, as they carry their dead rise into the extreme bow.

In Florida, V-bottomed sailing craft were used near Jacksonville; these had hulls like the Potomac River dory boat or northern skipjacks. They had the same high chines and were planked fore and aft over a complete set of frames; the bow was straight and plumb; and the transom usually had some rake. These boats were very heavily and roughly built of cypress and local yellow pine

CBMM #82-14-1

T-515

BESSIE LEE - Chinocheague (Sinepuxent Bay)
Skiff





T-515

BESSIE LEE

St. Michaels, Md

Port side - bow

A.E. Witty 5/84

Bessie Lee



T-515

BESSIE LEE

St. Michaels, Md

Interior hull

A.E. Witty 5/84